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THE ETHICS OF ARISTOTLE. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by John Burnet, M. A., Professor of Greek in the United College of St. Salvator and St. Leonard, St. Andrews. Methuen and Co., London, 1900. Pp. lii, 502.

This work is an essay in illustration of a single point of view: it is a study of the "dialectical method" as applied by Aristotle to the treatment of ethical problems. It is not designed to take the place of exegetical commentaries of a larger scope, and it must therefore not be condemned for omissions which in an ordinary edition would be serious defects. There is no critical apparatus; alterations of the text are in some cases introduced without comment; and in the notes some important difficulties of interpretation are ignored. Professor Burnet stands or falls according to the measure of his success in establishing his primary thesis.

This thesis is touched upon in the preface. Mr. Burnet modestly explains that the announcement of Professor Bywater's text and Mr. Stewart's "Notes" had caused him to lay his own work aside. His motive for now publishing it appears in the following extract:

"... I was conscious that my method of interpretation was a somewhat novel one, and might possess a certain interest for students of Aristotle. I had come to the conclusion that most of the difficulties that have been raised about the *Ethics* were due to the fact that, though the dialectical character of many passages had long been admitted, commentators had never thoroughly recognized that the treatise was dialectical throughout. They had tried to find in it the scientific and metaphysical basis of Aristotle's Moral Philosophy, and when they discovered instead that the foundations of the doctrine here set forth were of the most shifting character, taken as they are at one time from the opinions of ordinary people, at another from popular Platonism, they have been ready to accuse Aristotle of inconsistency or to doubt the authenticity of the treatise in its present form."

The Introduction states in stronger terms the point of view (p. xvi). After alluding to the theory of "duplicate passages," Mr. Burnet remarks:

"It is the case that, in certain parts of the work, Aristotle appears to discuss the same subject several times over and that these discussions are *frequently inconsistent* and apparently quite independent of each other. But I have tried to show that this fact

admits of another explanation. The Ethics is, and from the nature of the case must be, a dialectical and not a demonstrative work, and it is, as we shall see, entirely in accordance with Aristotle's own view of the method which is appropriate in such a case *to give as many solutions of the difficulties which arise as can be given, without any regard to the real philosophic validity of those solutions*. If it can be shown that these apparent duplicates are really successive applications of the different dialectical *τρόποι* appropriate to the subject, the critical problem does not arise. *Aristotle is not committed to all or any of the solutions he gives any more than Plato is committed to the successive definitions of knowledge given in the Theaitetos*. Nor can we even assume that the true solution is necessarily given at all. It often is given; but it was contrary to Aristotle's own principles to *base* the exposition of Politics on his metaphysical system." (Italics mine.)

The view thus expressed is offered as an alternative to the theory of duplicate passages. The Ethics is a dialectical work. The inconsistencies we find in the doctrine are not a problem for criticism: for the doctrine is not based on the metaphysical system of its author. On the contrary, Aristotle is giving as many solutions of the difficulties which arise as can be given, without regard to their "real philosophical validity," and without committing himself to all or any of them.

On this view the alleged discrepancies between the doubtful books and the remainder of the Nicomachean treatise present no difficulty. Accordingly, "the assumption made in this edition is that the disputed books are really Aristotle's" (p. xiii). The expression "frequently inconsistent" (in the second extract above quoted) needs to be read in connection with Mr. Burnet's remark on p. xiii: "Of course it would be a different matter if, as some critics hold, any *real inconsistency* could be detected between the teaching of the doubtful books and the remainder of either treatise. I have tried to interpret them on the assumption that there is none." Would it be captious to suggest that if Aristotle's intention is "to give as many solutions of the difficulties which arise as can be given, without any regard to the real philosophical validity of those solutions," and without "committing himself to all or any" of them, a commentator ought not to *assume* that there are no "real inconsistencies" between the doubtful books and the rest?

It is to be regretted that Professor Burnet has prejudiced his

case by an unguarded statement of it. The impression is conveyed that "dialectical" implies disregard of the "real philosophical validity" of the conclusions obtained; so that we cannot be certain that Aristotle any more believed in all or any of them than Plato believed in definitions of knowledge which he wrote a whole dialogue to refute. There is, moreover, some obscurity in the last two sentences quoted: "Nor can we even assume that the true solution is necessarily given at all. It often is given; but it was contrary to Aristotle's own principles to base the exposition of Politics on his metaphysical system." The language suggests that in some cases Aristotle withheld the solution which he believed to be true, from some pedantic scruple about the method to be observed. And how does Professor Burnet know that the true solution is often given? By what criterion does he decide that any solution whatever is "true"?

There is one more objection to be made to this statement of the editor's contention. Some confusion arises, here and in several other places, from the use of an ambiguous metaphor. "It was contrary to Aristotle's principles to *base* the exposition of Politics on his metaphysical system" (p. xvii). Commentators "had tried to find in" the Ethics "the scientific and metaphysical *basis* of Aristotle's Moral Philosophy, and when they discovered instead that the *foundations* of the doctrine here set forth were of the most shifting character . . ." etc. (p. v). "It is not necessary to *base* πολιτική on φυσική" (note, p. 59). "The work we are about to study may fairly be called ἡθικά because it is, as we shall see, a piece of dialectic *based* on ἡθικά προτάσεις, that is to say, premisses derived from an examination of human character" (p. xxvi).

On the other side, we read elsewhere: "The fact is that we must go to the 'Physics' for Aristotle's moral philosophy" (p. 69). "It is characteristic of him to keep the metaphysical *groundwork* of his practical science in the background as much as possible" (p. 108). (Italics mine.)

If there is a metaphysical and physical groundwork, however far it may be "in the background," there is reason to complain of expressions which may be taken to imply that the Ethics might have been written by a man who was not an Aristotelian. In the former set of extracts "basis" and "foundation" mean starting-point or first principle, or else the "premisses" (in this case ἐνδοξα) from which, by a sifting process of critical comparison, the first

principle is reached. But the editor leaves us in doubt whether a formal independence of metaphysic, as a matter of method, or a real and doctrinal independence, is intended. The difference is of vital import to his hypothesis.

That dialectic, the method codified in the Topics, was to have a place in every scientific inquiry, has always been recognized, and is indeed expressly affirmed by Aristotle: "being," he says, "a method of testing truth, it may be applied to the first principles of all studies" (Top. A. 2). Professor Burnet's point is that it enters more largely into the Ethics than his predecessors have been aware that it does. The treatise is "dialectical throughout" (p. v). The meaning of this statement is best illustrated by a crucial example—the two "inconsistent" accounts of pleasure in books H and K. The note on H. xii. § 3, runs thus: "The third and decisive *ἐνστάσις*. We must substitute *ἐνέργεια* for *κίνησις*. We need not discuss whether this is or is not 'inconsistent' with Book x, where the *ἡδονή* is distinguished from the *ἐνέργεια* which it accompanies. Aristotle is dealing here with the argument of Speusippos, and he only modifies his statement so far as is necessary for his immediate purpose" (p. 333). On H. xiii. § 2 the note ends thus: ". . . We shall find Aristotle's own teaching about this in Book x. At present we are only getting rid of the idea which the account given of *ἀκρασία* might suggest, that all pleasure is bad" (p. 336). On K. v. § 7 Professor Burnet remarks: "It is said that this is inconsistent with Book vii where pleasure is defined as *ἀνεμπόδιστος ἐνέργεια*. But that is purely dialectical. The *γένεσις αἰσθητή* of Speusippos is there developed dialectically into *ἀνεμπόδιστος ἐνέργεια* and it is not necessary to go further for the purpose of the argument there. Here we have a further step but no inconsistency" (p. 457).

Professor Burnet, as I have already remarked, has not explained what criterion enables him to pronounce that the teaching of Book x is "Aristotle's own," while that of Book vii is "purely dialectical." Apparently the treatise is, at any rate in part, dogmatic. In the dogmatic passages we must suppose that Aristotle has some regard for the "real philosophical validity" of his conclusions, and is in some sense "committed to" his statements. But the dogmatic can be discriminated from the dialectical only by bringing the metaphysical and physical groundwork out of "the background" and criticising the ethical doctrine on the as-

sumption of a fundamental agreement. And so "there's the old idol on his base again."

Professor Burnet gives a clear account of the dialectical process which consists in the critical comparison of current beliefs, and leads to the first principle of the science, namely (in this case) the definition of the Good for Man (Intro. § 25). He then proceeds:

"Once we have got our definition, however, the procedure becomes quite different. Our analysis of it, though it is deliberative and not demonstrative, will proceed through middle terms and can only be expressed adequately in the form of a series of practical syllogisms. . . ." We must not expect mathematical accuracy. ". . . . The starting point of Politics cannot be anything more than a general truth; we cannot hope to find a universal and necessary axiom such as those from which the geometer starts. And it will be absolutely impossible to lay down universal rules of action. Every act is a particular act and for that reason cannot be brought under a universal rule. As in medicine and navigation, we must always take into account the particular circumstances of the case, and these cannot be formulated or predicted" (Intro. § 26).

The definition of the Human Good is reached in Book A, chap. vi. Are we to understand that the remainder of the treatise consists of an "analysis" of this definition "expressed in the form of a series of practical syllogisms"? If Professor Burnet had attempted to explain the meaning of this description he might have discovered that it is absolutely inconsistent with the statement that the *Ethics* is dialectical throughout. At this point, in fact, the editor throws up his brief. In a work whose avowed purpose is to solve the problems of interpretation by proceeding on the assumption that the Aristotelian method is of a particular kind, two totally different and inconsistent conceptions of that method are presented as if they were identical. (1) The first conception is of a purely "dialectical" method, which gives as many solutions of the difficulties as can be given, without regard to their real philosophical validity. The conclusion in any one case may not (for all we know) express Aristotle's own view at all. The "*Ethics*" is a string of discussions "frequently inconsistent" and "apparently quite independent of each other," because it is contrary to Aristotle's principles to base the exposition of *Politics* on his metaphysical system. (2) The second conception is of a

method which by a preliminary criticism of popular beliefs collects a definition of the Human Good. That this definition states Aristotle's own view we may ascertain by comparing it with his physical and metaphysical doctrines expressed elsewhere. Only, to avoid the appearance of dogmatizing, he prefers to lead up to it by showing that, when the current views are confronted, they may be made by mutual concessions to tally more or less with his own preconceived opinion. This opinion has a metaphysical and physical groundwork, kept in the background. The definition so reached serves as "starting-point," and the rest of the treatise consists of an analysis of it, expressed in the form of a series of practical syllogisms.

It is clear that these two descriptions contradict one another at every point, and I believe I am not misrepresenting Professor Burnet's work when I say that at every point either description can be supported by quotation from his Introduction and Notes. His capacity for self-contradiction may be further illustrated from the extract just given. Compare the following statements: (1) "Every act is a particular act and for that reason cannot be brought under a universal rule" (Introd. § 26); (2) "Ignorance shown in the deliberate preference of bad acts to good, and ignorance of the *universal rules of conduct*, come to the same thing, ignorance of the major premiss of the practical syllogism" (p. 117); (3) "Practical wisdom . . . must be capable not only of apprehending . . . the 'right rule' . . . to apply in each department of life; it must also enable us to see that the particular act under consideration is in the circumstances *a case of that general rule*" (p. 248). (Italics mine.)

These quotations are enough to show that some of Professor Burnet's own statements stand in need of a dialectical treatment, which ought not to be left to the reader. There is in the book not a little vague and confused writing about subjects which need the utmost precision of terms. Unfortunately this negligence is particularly noticeable in the editor's treatment of the fundamental distinction of theoretical from "practical" science. The original fallacies of the Aristotelian view are reproduced, with a fidelity almost perverse, in the following words:

"Each of these kinds of science has its own good or end, something that makes it worth knowing; but this will be different in each case. . . . The end or good of" theoretical "science lies in

conformity to reality, and this conformity is truth. When we have reached this we have reached the completion (τέλος) of the science, and there is nothing beyond it for us to attain.

"If, however, the *object* of a science is something which has not its source of motion in itself, our relation to it at once becomes different. If the efficient cause is in ourselves, it becomes possible for us to *realize the object* of our science, and this realization becomes the 'end' or completion of the science. The object of it is no longer 'what is' (τὸ ὄν), but the γένεσις of 'what is to be' (τὸ ἐσόμενον); we are no longer spectators but actors" (Intro. § 12). (*Italics mine.*)

The cardinal word, *object*, changes its meaning in the course of the paragraph. In the first sentence it means *the thing known*. In the second sentence we hear that when (as in the case of practical science) it is possible for us to realize the object, this *realization* is the *end* of the science. In the third sentence the *object* of the science is said to be "the γένεσις of what is to be" *i. e.* the process by which the human good comes into existence. Here "object" has the same *meaning* as "end" in the second sentence.

This appalling confusion is alas! only too Aristotelian, and poisons the Ethics at their source. But as Professor Burnet appears to be unconscious of any ambiguity, it may be worth while to point out a few of the fallacies involved.

The *object* of Ethical Science is the Human Good. That is the thing known. The science, in so far as it is *science*, is concerned with *knowing* this object—with ascertaining what the Human Good *is*. This is a question about "what is," and truth is so far the only important thing. There perhaps we ought to stop; but Aristotle will not let us. He will have it that Ethics is a "practical" science and has a further *end*, which is sometimes the process by which the Good comes into existence, at other times the Good which comes into existence by this process, or preferably both at once—as in Professor Burnet's exposition. Thus by the use of "object" to mean (1) something known, (2) the process of bringing something into existence, (3) something so brought into existence, "knowing" and "doing" are comfortably identified; "we are no longer spectators, but actors;" theory is altogether excluded from Ethics; and we reach the idea of a science which is so uncompromisingly practical that it has no regard for truth. Never mind whether the Human Good *is* a virtuous



activity of the soul, or pleasure, or anything else: our business is to realize it!\*

It is of course true that, as Professor Burnet has usefully pointed out, the question, How is the Good to be realized? and the training of the legislator are all along kept in view. But to call even these problems "practical" still encourages ambiguity. It is misleading to say that Aristotle "is no idle speculator, but a man in all earnestness making practical proposals which he has hopes of getting adopted" (p. xxix). As a quite general statement it would be truer to say that the whole treatise is occupied with a question of "what is"—namely, What is the Human Good?—a theoretical question. When the answer has been finally stated in the tenth book, Aristotle begins the last chapter with the remark that his design is not yet fully carried out, for "as it is said, in practical matters, to see and know the various duties is not the end, but to practise them." This last chapter discusses the value of different expedients for realizing the Good by the formation of virtue. Even here we still inquire "what is," when we ask What is the best way to realize the Good?

That Aristotle is less confused on this point than the editor appears from Pol. iii. 8. 1279 b 11: "We must define at somewhat greater length the nature of each of these polities. For the subject is not free from difficulties; and, when we are treating any subject philosophically and not merely with an eye to practice, it is incumbent on us not to neglect or omit anything, but to exhibit the truth on every kind of question" (see Zeller, "Aristotle," Eng. trans. ii. p. 136, who comments on this passage, "While therefore practical philosophy *quâ* practical has to do with action, *quâ* philosophy it has the scientific interest of pure knowledge"). We may, then, look for a certain amount even of "idle speculation" in the Ethics.

Two pages of the Introduction are devoted to the Final Cause, which deserves fuller treatment. The statement is vague, and there is no attempt to clear up the ambiguities of the word "end."

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\* Compare p. 248: "The conclusion of a practical syllogism is always an action;" p. 6, on τέχνη . . . μέθοδος . . . πράξις . . . προαίρεσις: "The study of πολιτική is all four . . . That πολιτική is also a πράξις follows from the fact that it is a practical science." Here the *study* of the science, the *science* itself, and the *practice* are treated as the same thing. A more instructive commentary on the dangers of the phrase "practical science" could not be devised.

"Completion," "limit," and "something which we desire for its own sake" are treated as synonymous phrases. The muddle may be in some degree Aristotelian, but to reproduce it is not helpful. The introduction concludes abruptly with a discussion of Book A. chap. vi.

Professor Burnet has not thrown much light on the dark places: sometimes he fairly "radiates obscurity." The commentary is chiefly valuable where it discusses the origin of the *ἐνδοξα* and on this kind of question it may be consulted with profit. Professor Burnet's views would have been more accessible if they had been put forward in an essay rather than in an edition which, from the nature of its design, is so incomplete as to be by itself of small use for the ordinary student. The advanced reader will welcome the quotation at the foot of the text of parallel passages from the work of Eudemus. A full and useful index completes the volume.

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THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM. By M. Lazarus, translated from the German by Henrietta Szold. In four parts. Parts I and II. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900-1901.

The first volume of this work was published in 1898. It contained the parts here offered in an English translation. The second volume has not yet appeared. Professor Lazarus is well known as an ethno-psychologist, and a student of Hebrew literature. It is therefore natural that this study by the aged philosopher of the inner life of his own people should be looked upon by the Publication Society as "his crowning service to the cause of Judaism." It will no doubt render a valuable service both by making more intelligible to the general public that form of Judaism which found its chief expression in the Talmuds and by leading to a more adequate appreciation of Israel's moral development through obedience to the law. Not merely the language, but the thought, of the Talmudic teachers must be translated. It is not sufficient to understand a multitude of technical terms and abbreviations, and to have the requisite patience for following a discourse ever ready to fly off on a tangent at the sound of a word or the touch of an idea. One must be able to read